



Research integrity — it's about more than misconduct

The definition of integrity is “the quality of being honest and having strong moral principles that you refuse to change” (meaning in the Cambridge English Dictionary). Yet research integrity is frequently discussed through the lens of misconduct or concerns around reproducibility. However, as we can see from this quote, integrity is about more than that. It is about who you are as a person and your behaviour. Your behaviour in terms of how you do your work, towards your immediate colleagues and towards those with whom you communicate; whether across the research and innovation (R&I) system or the general public.

In our report on research integrity (Research integrity — a landscape study <https://www.vitae.ac.uk/vitae-publications/research-integrity-a-landscape-study>), we found that researchers' immediate environment strongly influences behaviour, frequently overriding institutional and national policy, and that boosting research integrity requires a culture of continuous improvement. This is a bigger conversation than “just” research integrity. It is about principles, values and the cultures that underpin them, so let's start by moving away from the term “research integrity” and instead think about where we want to go.

High quality R&I is rigorous, accurate, original, honest and transparent. And researchers and innovators engage in this work because they want to improve their knowledge, they want to make discoveries for the benefit of society, and they want to satisfy their own curiosity. So what are the characteristics of a system that allows people to do that? Such a system encourages collaboration, openness, multidisciplinary work and creativity. It also allows people to take risks and to fail (presentation on UK Research Integrity Office (UKRIO) 2021 annual conference by Professor Dame Ottoline Leyser, available from: <https://youtu.be/qH4dvrYaGIU>).

However, across the current system we see a series of interconnected problems. The way money and credit are allocated reinforces the lone genius model for research rather than recognising its collaborative nature. Proxy measures for quality become accepted measures for everything (e.g. journal impact factors). And when just a few measures are consistently used across the system, this crushes diversity and compromises quality. Frequently the answer given to solving

some of these issues has been to try and incorporate more measures. This adds further pressure to the system, expanding workloads, decreasing time for research and increasing stress.

Launched in April 2018, UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) is a UK government non-departmental public body and the largest funder of research in the UK. UKRI's vision is *to create an outstanding R&I system that gives everyone the opportunity to contribute and to benefit, enriching lives locally, nationally and internationally*. In order to achieve this, we need to **reassert what we actually value**. Assessment criteria define what we value in the R&I system. These criteria must therefore support all the things we would like the system to deliver. With this approach in mind, what is UKRI doing to support the development of this system?

UKRI is establishing and hosting the first UK Committee on Research Integrity (Promoting research integrity across the UK, <https://www.ukri.org/news/promoting-research-integrity-across-the-uk/>). This will be the first of its kind in the UK. It will seek to unite the research community as we work to address systemic pressures, and recognise and promote the behaviours that make the UK one of the best places in the world to conduct research. The committee will also build the evidence base around issues on research integrity across the country, providing a clearer picture of what is happening on the ground.

As a signatory of the UK Concordat to Support Research Integrity (<https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/topics/research-and-innovation/concordat-research-integrity>), we are working with the other signatories to promote the principles and commitments that comprise a national framework enabling good research conduct. This is one of many concordats to which UKRI is a signatory, creating a larger framework to incentivise the behaviours, values and principles that support a positive R&I culture and environment throughout the country.

UKRI is also thinking about the openness of R&I. In August 2021, we launched our new open access policy. It requires immediate open access for peer-reviewed research articles submitted for publication from 1 April 2022. The policy also includes a new requirement for monographs, book chapters and edited

collections published from 1 January 2024 to be made open access within 12 months of publication. As Professor Duncan Wingham, Executive Chair of the UKRI Natural Environment Research Council observed: “Open access plays a key role in ensuring that the benefits of research can be felt across the research and development ecosystem, society and the economy” (UKRI’s new open access policy will help to unlock the benefits of research for society, available from: <https://www.ukri.org/about-us/policies-standards-and-data/good-research-resource-hub/open-research/ukris-new-open-access-policy-will-help-to-unlock-the-benefits-of-research-for-society/>).

As well as these interventions focused on openness and integrity, UKRI is also considering the wider R&I system, and the reward and recognition processes that underpin it. UKRI is creating a space to trial culture-related interventions through the Good Practice Exchange (GPEx) (UKRI welcomes government’s R&D People and Culture Strategy, available from: <https://www.ukri.org/news/ukri-welcomes-governments-rd-people-and-culture-strategy/>). This new way of working will bring together resources and initiatives across the R&I sector, to share best practice. Values of inclusion and collaboration will be at the core of the GPEx. Pilot projects include areas of concern for many sector stakeholders, from bullying and harassment to the adoption of the Royal Society’s Résumé for Researchers (R4R), a narrative CV.

UKRI committed to the adoption of the R4R in September 2020 (UKRI reducing unnecessary bureaucracy, available from: <https://www.ukri.org/news/ukri-reducing-unnecessary-bureaucracy/>). This new format

enables researchers and innovators to evidence and be recognised for a wider range of contributions. This will enable our diverse R&I workforce to demonstrate who they are as individuals. As well as our own rollout, through GPEx we will also be working with other funders to adopt the R4R (Funders joint statement: exploring a shared approach towards a narrative CV, available from: <https://www.ukri.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/UKRI-230721-4995CommsResumeJointFundersStatement-Final.pdf>); sharing insights and evaluations to collectively transform how people are assessed and what activities are valued across the system.

As we emphasised at the beginning of this piece, research integrity is about more than misconduct. It is about culture and environment, and it is about behaviours and expectations. At UKRI we are thinking about these things holistically to create a better R&I sector. As our CEO Professor Dame Ottoline Leyser acknowledges with regard to culture change: “There’s never going to be a silver bullet. You want to do multiple things simultaneously” (“Make research fun again”: UK’s powerful funding chief is on a mission to change scientific culture, available from: <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-020-02424-z>).

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